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House of Representatives **DELIVERING THE BENEFITS THAT OUR FILIPINO VETERANS WERE PROMISED**

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time, and we are, of course, supporting H.R. 2297, a bill that incorporates many provisions that have been discussed at the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and in the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and it includes provisions that upgrade benefits in many, many areas.

I would suspect, Mr. Chairman, that if this bill was taken one by one in terms of the provisions in there and the health bill that we hope will follow sometime later today, veterans across the Nation would understand that we are really keeping our promise to our Nation's veterans in both our benefits and our health provisions.

I would say to the chairman of the full committee, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Smith) and to the ranking member, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Evans), the

combination of the benefit and the health bill probably represents one of the most productive years in the history of this Congress in terms of veterans' benefits and veterans' health care. So I thank the chairman, and I thank the ranking member for bringing all these provisions together and working so hard and allowing Members from both sides of the aisle to contribute. There are provisions in these bills that represent both Democratic and Republican contributions, and I think that is the way we ought to behave here, and that is what this bill represents.

I just want to add a few comments to what has been stated previously. Two provisions which I helped to write are in the bill. The first involves a cause for which I have been fighting ever since I became a Member of Congress, and it is exceptionally gratifying to see progress on an important

(over)

issue, and that is restoring the rightful benefits to Filipino World War II veterans.

Many of us know that after being drafted into service by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, after bravely fighting alongside soldiers from the U.S. mainland, many Filipino veterans were deprived of their promised benefits by the Congress of 1946. In the intervening years, many of these veterans have emigrated to the United States and have become American citizens. This bill will increase the compensation received by one part of the Filipino Armed Forces, and that is the new Filipino Scouts.

They had been given what is called the "peso rate" in their disability compensation. That is one-half of what an American soldier would get. And they have been receiving that peso rate since the end of the war, whether they have lived in the United States or in the Philippines. For these that live in the United States, their cost of living is equal to the veterans here, and paying half is just simply not acceptable. Upon the passage of this bill, the widows of the Filipino World War II veterans will also receive the full amount of their DIC benefits, and burial benefits for the new

Scouts will also be restored. So this is justice restored after almost 60 years of being denied.

There is another provision which I am pleased to see in this bill, and that involves life insurance policies. The VA currently holds about 4,000 insurance policies, valued at about \$23 million, on which payment has not been made because the VA has not been able to locate the identified beneficiary.

What will happen after this bill passes is that the VA can pay secondary benefits if we cannot locate the primary beneficiary. And if no beneficiary files within 4 years, the VA secretary may pay another appropriate relative. It is a shame to have Veterans paying for life insurance throughout their lifetimes only to have their insurance unclaimed. So this will benefit the families of many of our veterans in this country.

Mr. Speaker, these are just two portions of the bill. There are many, many provisions which have been described by my colleagues. Again, I think it is a great advance for veterans to be able to receive the benefits that are in H.R. 2297, so I urge Members to support this bill.